

Assessment of house at 90 Florida Road, Durban



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1. Introduction

Debbie Whelan of Archaic Consulting was approached by Kamal Orie of Archipoid cc. to compile a short research and assessment document of the house at 90 Florida Road, Durban. Being situated in prime restaurant zone, this house has been occupied by a number of different businesses in recent years, all of which have left their mark on its internal fabric.

The intention of the current owners is to repair and restore as much as possible, stripping some of the accretions that have appeared in latter years, and preparing the building to be let as offices. As the house is over 60 years of age, and situated in a Conservation Zone, an historical report, *status quo* and intentions are imperative in order to correctly refurbish the building in accordance with the requirements of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Heritage Act No 4 of 2008.

2. Methodology

Archipod cc. provided the original plans as well as others which extended and altered the property over the years. This information was dovetailed into information in the public domain which provided additional facts about the property. The Deeds Office in Pietermaritzburg was visited in order to consult the Land Registers, which detail the different owners from original grant until the capture of the Microfilms in the mid-1980s. Relevant publications on architecture and conservation in Durban were also consulted, and these are detailed in the reference section at the end of this report.

3. History of property

The date on the original plans is obscured, but given that they appear to have been signed by John Nichol in his capacity as Mayor, this would have been after 1899 when the property was surveyed, and 1901 when Nichol handed over his Mayoral duties to Ernest Leslie Acutt. This situates the property in the late Victorian period, and certainly the original idiom reflects this, although changes have been made over the years.

Originally known as Subdivision 190 of Block AL, Townlands, Durban, Subdivision 942 was a 1900 grant of 1 rood and 1.322 square feet to W. Eaton and Sons. In 1900 this was sold to Lionel Jacobs, who sold on in 1935 to Edgar Surgeson. Surgeson sold in 1938 to Robert Boyd, and in 1944 he sold to Secondio Lorenzino. Lorenzino passed on the property to 5 heirs (Stella Magliano, Bianco Del Fante, Alda Taylor, Emilio Lorenzino) and in 1977 the whole was transferred to Brian Clark. In 1987 it appears as though a divorce settlement meant that the property was sold, this time onto Faustino Gilio and Angela Gilio. Given the details on plans submitted, it is suspected that it was at this time that the formerly residential building was converted into offices. It was possibly also at this time that the house was re-roofed, as the Iscor stamp is clearly visible on the underside of the sheeting.

4. Site and urban context

The property is situated at a busy intersection with the former Argyle Road and Florida Road and also gives onto Sixth Avenue. Opposite are the restored buildings known as Quarters, which have been identified by the client as a precedent study in carrying out the restoration work on this building. Adjacent to no 90 Florida Road is a three story building which houses the offices of Design Workshop, beyond which the street retains to large part its suburban scale rhythm.

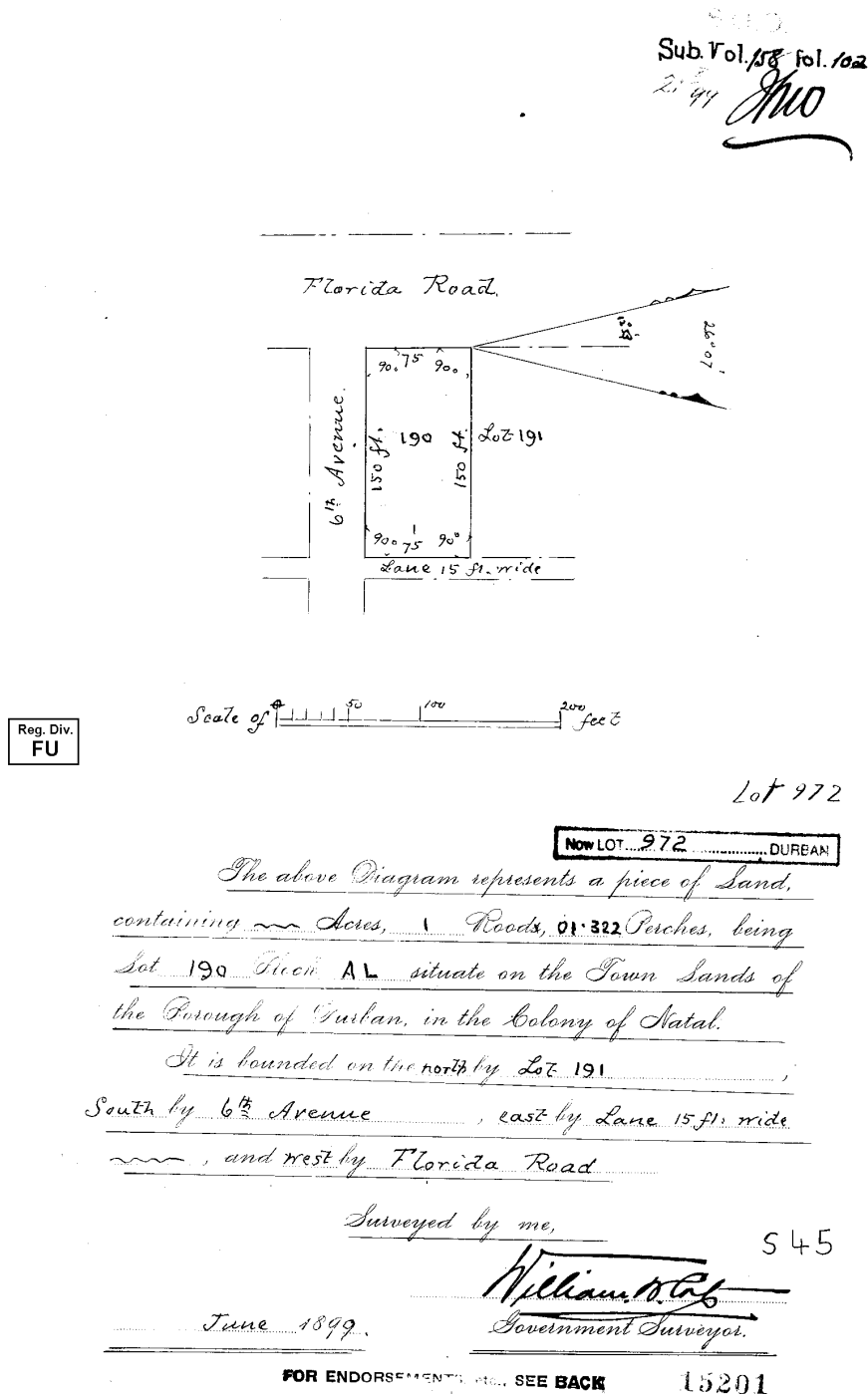


Figure 1: Survey diagram for Lot 190 Block AL June 1899



Figure 2: Composite showing immediate streetscape above 90 Florida Road



Figure 3: Composite of intersection looking onto Argyle Road and Florida Road



Figure 4: Composite of elevation down Sixth Avenue

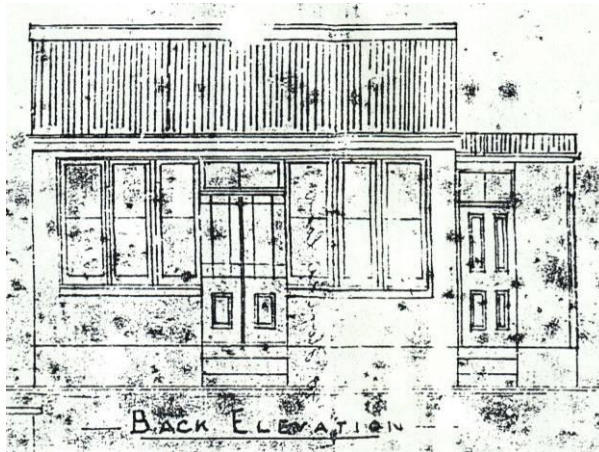
5. Description of building

The structure is a double story late Victorian house which has been altered in past years: the front balcony has had its timberwork removed and masonry walls and columns now enclose it to balcony height. There are string courses that run along the south elevation which clearly delineate the different stories. At some stage in the history of the building, the balcony to the south was enclosed with louvred windows to form a bathroom. Both of these accretions substantially altered the lightness of the building, which closely resembled its counterparts across the road at Quarters.

The rear of the building was originally truncated. In 1914 Mr Jacobs extended the structure to the rear, creating a new smoking room. In 191 he again added on, this time creating the upper story across the smoking room at the rear.



Figures 5 and 6: showing roofline on the north elevation

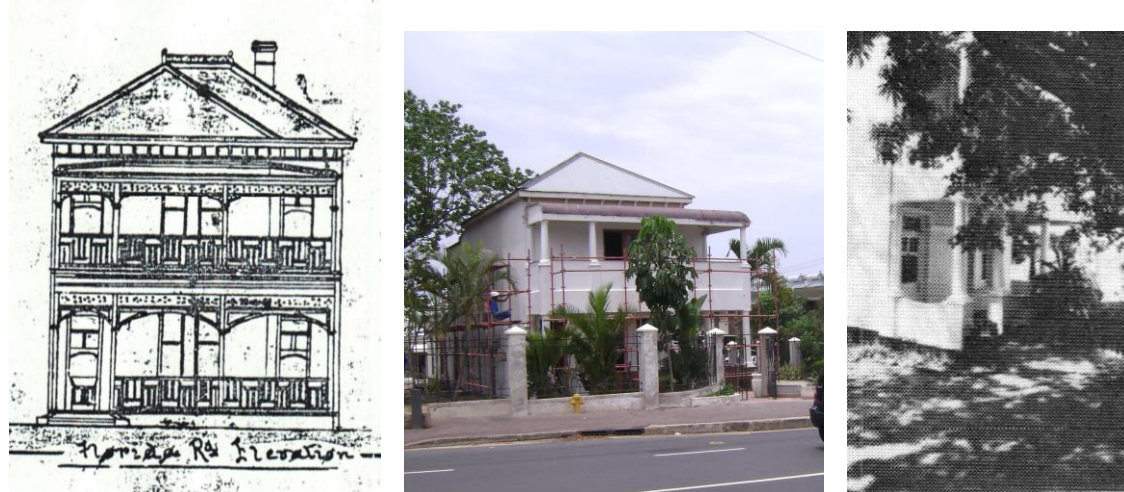


Figures 7 and 8: Showing elevations of smoking room (1914) and the east elevation as altered by Giglio in 1992



Figure 9: Showing balcony and aluminium doors to the south elevation

In 1992, Faustino Gilio, then the owner of the property, added the double aluminium doors and windows to the rear of the house, as well as the self-conscious balcony to the south. At this point the building was being used as offices. At some stage too the building was clad at dado level with brown slate cladding.



Figures 10, 11 and 12: Showing west elevation as per original drawing (ca 1901) the same elevation in 2010 and detail from Brian Kearney's Revised Listing (1984)



Figures 13 and 14: Showing original elevation as per plans ca 1901 and the elevation from Sixth Avenue in 2010



Figures 15 and 16: The original rear to the building (ca 1901) garage and outbuildings on the eastern boundary. The garage was originally submitted in 1920?

6. Assessment of building

In discussing the building, the original plans are used as a reference point. Where it is unclear what the original purpose of the room was, this statement is followed by a question mark.

6.1 General Comments

The building is generally in good condition, although alterations have affected it in the past.

- It was re-roofed, possibly in 1992. The intention is to re-roof the building again, using a Chromodek or Colomet to mimic the roofing of Quarters across the road.
- The strip Oregon pine ceilings have been removed due to borer activity
- The walls have had the plaster removed as the lime plaster the covered it was friable
- There is a brown slate dado outside, and in the entrance hall running up the stairs
- The floor to what was previously the pantry is constructed of marine plywood.
- The rear elevation has a double aluminium door (ca 1992)
- The south elevation has a balcony and aluminium door (ca 1992)
- All windows to the aluminium doors have brown, speckled ceramic cills
- The first floor veranda has been partly enclosed (ca 1992)
- The columns to the veranda are pre-cast Tuscan
- The balustrade has been replaced by a masonry wall

6.2 Ground Floor

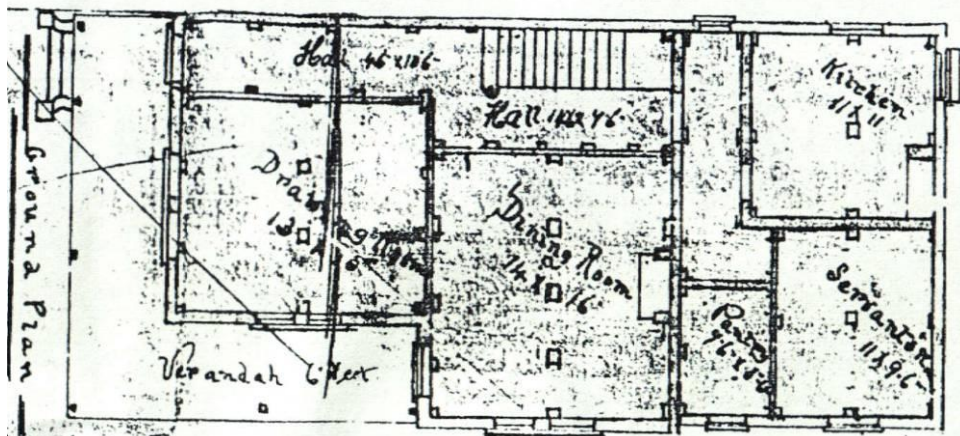


Figure 17: Ground floor plan ca 1901. Note that by the time Giglio carried out his major alterations, the hallway, kitchen and servants room had already been consolidated into the large open space that exists today. The pantry was reconfigured as a closed office.



Figures 18 and 19: front garden and encaustic tile veranda- The balustrade wall on the front elevation is finished off on a level and has brown slate cladding to the outside.



Figures 20 and 21: Entrance to Dining Room, lintel and architrave badly eaten by borer, the former removed, and ceiling in dining room showing removed strip timber ceiling.



Figures 22 and 23: view back to front door, and stairway dado of brown slate cladding



Fig 24: the marine plywood floor in the old pantry and Figure 25 the southern wall with friable plaster removed revealing quality of brickwork.



Figure 25: showing the storeroom, extant in the drawing prepared for Gilio in 1992, and in Figure 26 the layers of paint on the wall between the storeroom and what was recently used as a kitchen. Note that the paint is recent, as this wall/alteration is not part of the original plan of the house.



Figure 27: the staircase with original Newell post and the brown slate dado accretion to the supporting wall.

6.3 First Floor

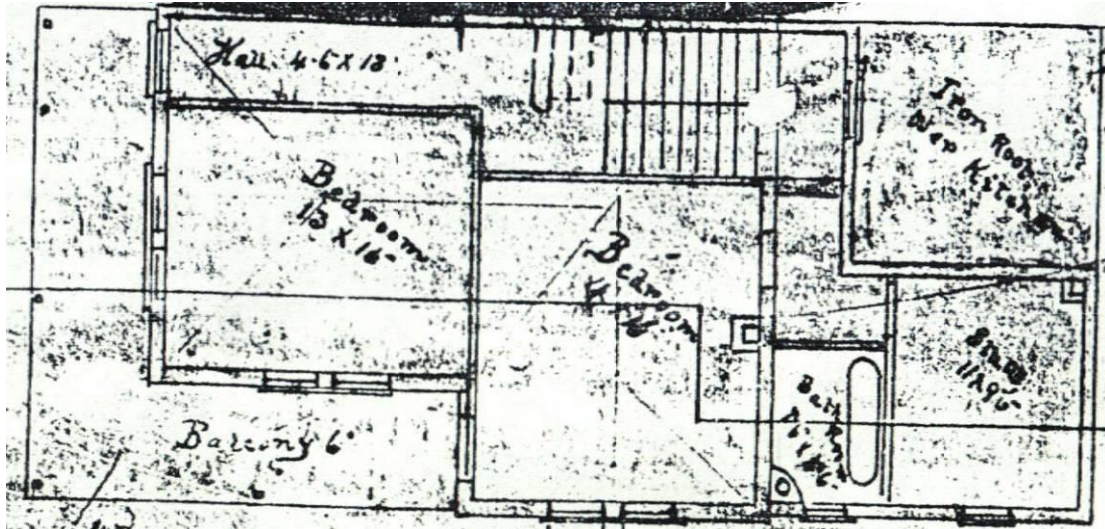


Figure 28: First floor plan ca 1901. It is assumed that the room next to the Iron Room to the right reads 'Study'.

The first floor of the house has been altered in the past to form offices: the hallway to the veranda no longer exists, and the veranda to the south was partly enclosed to form a bathroom. Currently the ceilings have all been removed, and the underside of the corrugated iron exposed. ISKOR stamps in it indicate that it has been re-roofed in relatively recent times. The floors to the iron room and the bathroom are partly eaten, and those parts of the planks should be replaced. The plaster has been stripped off all the walls, since the original plaster was very friable. New doors (ca 1992?) lead onto the veranda from the west facing bedroom.



Figure 29: Floor to 'Iron Room'



Figure 30: View over rear roof



Figure 31: South bedroom showing wall construction



Figure 32: Study?



Figure 33: Enclosed bathroom on first floor possibly added by Gilio: veranda to be reinstated

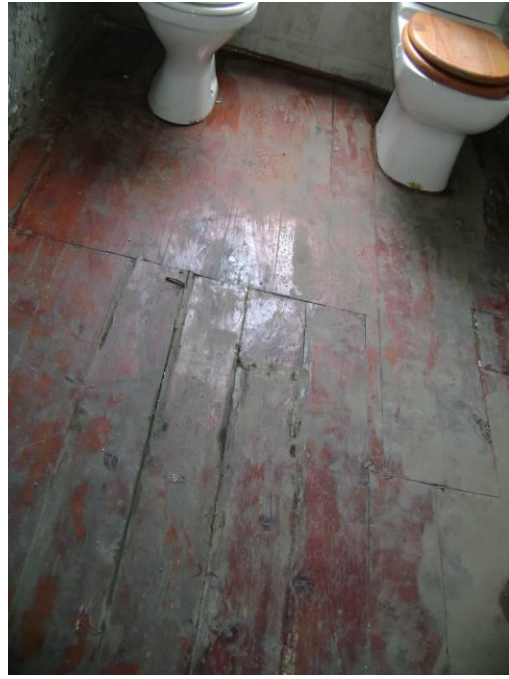


Figure 34: Bathroom as per 1901 drawing but with two toilets instead of a bath



Figure 35: South facing bedroom



Figure 36: West facing bedroom



Figure 37: view back towards enclosed bathroom wall



Figure 38: ceilings in west facing bedroom showing recent re-roofing

7. Recommendations

Brian Kearney's seminal listing of important buildings in Durban has this house itemized in the main text. Interpreting his assessment, as found in Figure 39 below, the following *status quo* was evident in 1984.

At the end of the criteria listing below, Kearney noted that this was a very good example situated within an area of special character. It is not, it must be noted, demarcated as being part of a group with a special character (Kearney 1984: 96).

Dissecting this listing, he describes it as a two storied Edwardian house. It is a very good example of Intrinsic Architectural design (lozenge 1) a very good example of building type (lozenge 2) a very good example of the style or period (lozenge 3) has very good applications in terms of detail and proportion (lozenge 4) is an excellent example of local technology (lozenge 5) and has limited/average association with an architect or engineer. It is also a very good example of intactness of form (lozenge 7) intactness of detail (lozenge 8) and condition (lozenge 9). In all, it was considered a building of value, in its siting, construction, context and condition, and, certainly these criteria stand today.

What was possibly overlooked by Kearney in this listing was that the original drawings show timber work to the verandas supported by timber columns in the manner that Quarters across the road has been restored, yet Kearney's photographs in 1984 show Tuscan columns and a balustrade wall of masonry construction. Certainly the drawing record does not elucidate on this discrepancy, but it is suspected that once the original timbers rotted, the walls were replaced with masonry and the columns with pre-cast concrete Tuscan columns characteristic of the Union Period.

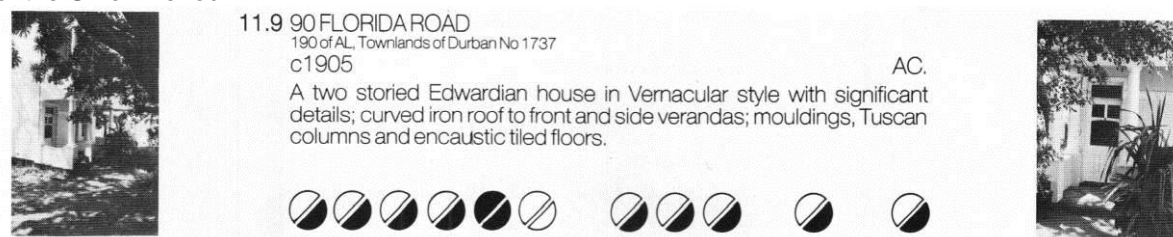


Figure 39: Brian Kearney's 1984 Assessment (Kearney 1984: 9)

7.1 Itemized recommendations and course of action:

- It is noted that the owners wish to replace the original timber veranda, which is virtually identical to that at Quarters over the road. It must be remembered that in the above 1984 photograph by Kearney, the veranda wall had a concave bow along its length, which at some time, was filled in to create an even level from column to column. The profile of this is available on the south elevation below the enclosed veranda.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: The author suggests that there are two courses of action; reinstating the timber veranda is possible though costly, and would need to be carried out by professionals such as those who did the work at Quarters. Timber also requires constant maintenance. The other course of action is to remove the enclosed veranda, work out the profile of the bow, and to reinstate this on the masonry veranda as it exists.

- The intention is to finish the roof and the walls with the same colour scheme, so that it is echoed across the intersection and retains some of the grace and charm of the precinct.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: these are reversible decisions. The author is of the opinion that this is an acceptable course of action

- Encaustic tile floor to ground floor veranda. In good condition with some chipped tiles

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Retain as is.

- The house was re-roofed, possibly in 1992. The intention is to re-roof the building again, using a Chromodek or Colomet to mimic the roofing of Quarters.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: the original sheeting is no longer on the roof, and has not been for many years. The author is of the opinion that this is an acceptable course of action.

- The strip Oregon pine ceilings have been removed as there has been a substantial amount of borer activity

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Replace ceilings and source extra boards (Amafa Materials bank)

- The walls have had the plaster removed as the lime plaster the covered it was friable

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Replaster, preferably with a lime plaster

- There is a brown slate dado outside, and in the entrance hall running up the stairs

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Remove slate and make good

- The floor to what was previously the pantry is constructed of marine plywood.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: replace floor with suspended timber floor.

- The rear elevation has a double aluminium door (ca 1992)

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- The south elevation has a balcony and aluminium door (ca 1992)

RECOMMENDED ACTION It would be preferable if these could be removed and appropriate timber doors and windows be instated

- All windows to the aluminium doors have brown, speckled ceramic cills

RECOMMENDED ACTION It would be preferable if these could be removed and appropriate cills (eg red quarry tile) be instated

- The first floor veranda has been partly enclosed (ca 1992)

RECOMMENDED ACTION: It would be preferable if this could be removed and the veranda reinstated

- The columns to the veranda are pre-cast Tuscan columns

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Depends on action taken with respect to veranda

- The balustrade has been replaced by a masonry wall

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Depends on action taken with respect to veranda

The principle of working on this house should be to bear in mind that it is an old building, and that the object of the exercise is not to create something new. It is important to replace materials with like, and to retain the proportions so that the ethos of the original construction is maintained.

8. References:

Kearney, B (1984) *A Revised listing of the important places and buildings in Durban*
Durban, City Council of Durban